10 Guidelines for Effective and Responsible Journalism

Control the basics and you are halfway there

1. **Get the facts right.**
   Make sure of all the facts in a story. Don’t just repeat what one person told you or what appeared on one announcement or press release. Double-check with second sources, e.g., if a statement says the number to call is X, check it out with the phone book, or call it to make sure it’s right. Be able to put a source’s name to every fact in a story, too. (It’s the editor’s job to read stories and look for errors and questions left unanswered as an aid to the writer. The editor is the writer’s first reader.)

2. **Stay neutral.**
   Don’t tell the reader what to think in a news story. Present the facts and any special context you can determine from interviews with extra sources, experts in the subject. If the subject of a story is controversial, make sure you talk to people on both – or all – sides of the issue and represent those various points of view in your article. Don’t take sides yourself. Be fair even to those with whom you disagree. And especially don’t write anything unkind or damaging about somebody without letting him or her have a chance to respond to the criticism in the article.

3. **Know more about the story than you put in the article.**
   A reporter needs to do enough reporting to make sure he or she understands the subject, but all of this fact-finding does not belong in the story. If the contents of your notebook or tape are all in the story, you may be missing something or you may not have seen all the possibilities.

4. **Don’t write news in the first person, singular or plural.**
   I and we belong in columns and editorials, not in news stories.

5. **Question everything.**
   Don’t guess at how someone spells his name, even if you think you know. Ask the person to spell it out. The same goes for statements of fact. Just because someone says something doesn’t relieve a writer of the responsibility of finding out if it’s true. Even teachers and principals can make mistakes.

6. **Think about the context.**
   Just because you know about something doesn’t mean your readers do. And if you don’t understand something, for sure the readers won’t. That means even the most famous people around your school need to be called by their full names on first reference. And don’t assume everyone knows what a particular organization or group does. Make it possible for a new student in your school to understand everything you put in the paper.
7. **Write conversationally, but don’t break the rules of grammar unnecessarily.**  
Don’t assume everyone knows the latest slang or catch phrase, but don’t let all your quotes sound like they were rehearsed either.

8. **Show good manners and good taste.**  
Don’t just write about your friends or your favorite causes, but try to include all of your readers in your choice of stories and pictures.

9. **Try to get beyond the standard bulletin-board announcements that are a part of the newspaper’s job: schedules, upcoming events, etc.**  
Endeavor to make the newspaper reflect the school and the people who learn, teach and work there. Ask yourself what makes this time unique and what makes these people unique and find a way to convey that information to others.

10. **Show some enthusiasm in your newspaper.**  
It’s contagious. Without being mean or disrespectful of others, a smile, a sense of humor and a little passion in the writing, pictures and display will make your newspaper that much more interest, useful and attractive to its readers.